The review of the book *Design in Italy*, by Paolo Fossati (1972), revives the discussion on this substantial and seminal work. Almost forgotten, *Design in Italy* is more likely a ‘removed classic’, even though it was one of the first publications that tackled the topic of the *Italian* design and identified it. The book is considered ‘difficult’ for its style and the inseparable interweaving of both the historical investigation and critical analysis that have weakened the assumption that we are dealing with an ‘unbiased’ history.

This essay tries to rediscover this work through a cross-disciplinary approach to the text (and images) without turning into a pedantic commentary. It also traces the threads of Fossati’s work, in order to understand its intimate construction, as well as the ‘insistences’ and the intentions of its author. Starting from the antinomy of the designer’s *role* and *figure*, the essay discloses the inner reasons and urgencies and focuses eventually on the ‘grip’ – namely the subtle *ethical* implication – that inspire the *present time* related to the past and the present day. By way of conclusion, design thinking and design doing return to the center of the contemporary art scene.
The critical relevance of this essay by Ferdinando Bologna is illustrated in reconstructing the particular characteristics of his historical methodology and the cultural and political context within which the work was written. The text is re-read highlighting the value and limits, for us today, of its analysis, in light of the critique to which Bologna’s work was subjected in his own time and later. In conclusion, to properly establish its status as a “classic of design history”, this article reflects upon the relationship between criticism and ideology, and the apparent absence of ideological positions in contemporary design history and criticism.

Questo articolo è disponibile in Italiano

Posted in AIS/Design Storia e Ricerche, numero 11 2018 Tagged critica storica, design e arti minori, Ideologia, storia della storiografia

The History of Design by Renato De Fusco (1984) is, more than thirty years after its publication, still the only reference text for students and enthusiasts that is truly widespread in Italy. Such great diffusion among Italian readers makes it the “first” of its kind, if we use the literal translation of the word “classic”. But if the quantitative criterion is not sufficient to label a work as a classic, a further reason is the fact that the method of analysis and synthesis developed by the author is configured as a transmissible and repeatable system, out of the chronological contingency, allowing to include it among the models of recognized value and therefore worthy of being repeated.

The paper aims to reconstruct, through the cultural and professional experiences of its author and the relationships interwoven with the various cultural and disciplinary fields, the reasons for a critical and editorial fortune that continues to fuel the debate among specialists, but that remains – today – the only attempt made in Italy to fully order and schematize the history of design.

Questo articolo è disponibile in Italiano

Posted in AIS/Design Storia e Ricerche, numero 11 2018 Tagged Design history, History of Architecture, ideal type, idealtipo, Neapolitan School, Renato De Fusco, scuola napoletana, storia del design, storia dell’architettura

The volume abecedario. La grafica del Novecento by Sergio Polano and Pierpaolo Vetta, published in 2002 for Electa, is considered a “classic” in the history of 20th-century graphic design.

Monica Pastore
graphic design for at least two reasons. On the one hand, for the credibility of its authors who, with their editorial choices, have defined a methodological model for the treatment of both textual content and images; on the other, for the success that it continues to have among professionals, researchers and students alike: today we are at the seventh reprint. All this without being a proper survey book on history. Indeed, as Sergio Polano repeatedly stresses in the preface, the book is an anthology of essays, a collection of partially published works.

This contribution considers that the originality of the volume lies in the very act of recollecting these writings; the volume in fact analyses some of the texts previously published in the magazine Casabella, which, from the mid-nineties under the new direction of Francesco Dal Co, became one of the places in which the debate on the historical and critical issues of graphic design took place. Moreover, the paper explores the genesis of the project – precisely in the special integration between texts and iconography; it analyses the central role of typography in Polano’s own approach to the theme, as the structural unit of graphic design; finally, it makes a comparison between abecedario and its sequel sussidiario. Grafica e caratteri moderni, placing them in the different historical moments in which they were respectively published.

Questo articolo è disponibile in Italiano

Posted in AIS/Design Storia e Ricerche, numero 11 2018 Tagged anthology, antologia, Casabella, designer as author, grafico-autore, history of graphic design, storia della grafica, tipografia, typography

we have never been human. design history and questions of humanity

Rosa te Velde

In this essay, I challenge the concept of humanity and the false universalisms proposed in relation to design that are key to Are we human? Notes on an archaeology of design (2016). Once the critiques of humanism laid out by Sylvia Wynter, Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova and others are taken into account, it is clear that design writing of the sort exemplified by Are we human? reproducens claims that are grounded in coloniality. I argue that in spite of the recent date of its publication the book reproduces the tropes of the well-established Western design history canon and therefore can be considered a classic – in spirit if not yet by renown. With this essay I want to argue that we need to continuously re-examine and challenge the canon and the classics in order to dismantle the normative gaze that reproduces Eurocentric and colonial interpretations of the human.

Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe.
Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1963

1. A tiny yellow book with a huge question

Are we human? Notes on an archaeology of design was published in 2016. It is a compact, pocket-sized book, and despite its bright yellow colour, which begs for attention, it would appear modest, given its size and the simple typography of its cover, were its simplicity not juxtaposed with the grand question: Are we human? In the introduction, the authors explain, “The notes just try to consider the role of design in defining the human animal. If the human is a question mark, design is the way that question is engaged” (p. 5). Not only do these lines firmly position the book within a post-humanist discourse, they also present the different texts as notes, implying that they are tentative in nature and indicating that theirs is only a limited attempt at addressing the issue at hand. Yet the aim of Are we Human? is nothing less than the reconstruction of an archaeology of design in relation to the discursive formation of being
human, which involves applying the Foucauldian archaeological method to a series of historical discourses on and of humanity in order to trace the role of design in their construction and vice versa. This takes place across sixteen field notes, starting with the origins of the human and concluding with a chapter on social media as architecture. The construction of such a vast chronological scale seems to function to position the phenomenon of design as central to humanity. Constructing an archaeology of design is a grand ambition for such a thin book, and yet the tone of voice throughout is at once effortless, compelling, and provocative.

The sixteen different chapters are organised semi-chronologically. The claim on the book’s back cover, that “the question are we human? is both urgent and ancient”, is substantiated by an attempt at a quick survey of human history from the origin of the species to our contemporary culture and the role of design. In the first five chapters the origin of the human species is explored through archaeological findings, and this is followed by an exposition of Darwinian evolutionary theory. The subsequent chapters are organised thematically, each revolving around a specific question that has occupied modern designers at one time or another, such as the fear of technology, which is relevant to the entire discourse of design. According to the authors, “The word design was called on in the 1830s to explicitly negotiate between human and machine in a discourse that again started in England […]. The concept of design […] remains a nineteenth-century product” (p. 77). Chapters six to sixteen consist of loose elaborations that focus on connecting different iconic designers within modernist design discourse with some lesser known references, entertaining examples and amusing details. These chapters move back and forth between different time periods, but nineteenth- and twentieth-century modernist design discourse is dominant. The excerpts in between the chapters hold a middle ground between stream-of-consciousness writing and prosaic ranting on design and humanity. The writings are accompanied by luscious imagery: colourful photos and scientific illustrations of renowned icons from the histories of design and architecture. The citations that are inserted between the chapters are drawn from an eclectic set of authors and theorists ranging from Honoré de Balzac, Sigfried Giedion, Marshall McLuhan, Henry van de Velde and Victor Papanek to Judith Butler and Donna Haraway. The overall design of the book merges glossiness and seriousness and is a visually pleasant composition – a delicious piece of eye candy.

Upon first glance, the book does not reveal that it was published on the occasion of the 3rd Istanbul Design Biennial, curated by the design and architectural historians (and wife and husband) Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley. This fact is mentioned only in the introduction and on the last page of the book, where Colomina and Wigley explain that the book “gathers our thoughts when preparing the 3rd Istanbul Design Biennial, ideas that guided the project, grew during it, and go beyond it” (2016, p. 287). Yet, it seems as if it was a strategic decision to leave the book ostensibly free of any markers of the biennial, as if it was meant to live a life of its own well beyond the scope of any time-bound event. This in itself perhaps aptly signifies the decontextualization and universalism that are symptomatic of and central to this book.

This essay is not necessarily a review of Are we Human?; rather, I am interested in seeing the book as a case study through which to explore the extent that Eurocentrism has been and is still central to design discourses, particularly when it comes to discussions of the human and humanity. Departing from an understanding of how the classic relates to canonisation, I argue that the book reproduces the dominant, normative design historical canon. Through a critical discourse analysis, I will attempt to analyse the book by rereading it alongside the work of Sylvia Wynter, Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano and Tony Fry, and asking: what are the paradoxes and problems of a humanist discourse – of talking of Man, as Fanon writes – in relation to design history?
2. A classic?

At first, the publication *Are we human?* is not an obvious example of a design history classic. It is too recent to be considered a classic, as it was only published in 2016. It may become very influential among particular circles of readers, perhaps mostly among design practitioners, because, first of all, it *looks good*; secondly, it is easy to read; and thirdly, its scope is seemingly comprehensive, covering both *design* and *humanity*. In fact, on a content level, the scope of this book is so broad that some readers may argue that it “comes to represent the whole universe, a book on a par with ancient talismans” (Calvino 1999, p. 18).

But if this book could be considered a design history classic, it would be because of the way that a sense of the *classic* is attached to certain canonised texts on design history. The book aspires to the definition of a *classic* in the sense that “even when we read it for the first time [it] gives the sense of rereading something we have read before” (Calvino, ibid.). The book is a compilation of well-known references within design history, only regrouped and retold in a new configuration, and as such will be incredibly familiar to a specific group people who are already well informed on its subject.

Among the lessons of the postcolonial critique produced in the field of literary studies is that notions of the *classic* cannot be considered in isolation from the power dynamics and cultural dominance at play in the processes of canonisation. The literary scholar Ankhi Mukherjea, for example, has explored the canonisation of what are considered to be *core texts* and, with reference to Gayatri Spivak, raises the question of epistemic violence, or how the “colonial canonical norm” has determined what counts as valuable knowledge and thus what can be considered a classic (Mukherjee, 2013, p. 45). In other words, canons are always produced in accordance with a dominant vision that attributes authority in the process of knowledge production.

3. The horizons of design history

Design history and design studies in themselves are fields established and mostly dominated by white Western scholars, and thus the knowledge production of these fields should be critically examined to understand the way it serves to reproduce a biased episteme through the recycling of specific iconic references and conceptualisations while refuting other examples, conceptualisations, voices, authors, and practices. In 2016, the *Decolonising Design* platform was founded by a group of design researchers, academics and practitioners. It was “born out from a general frustration with how design ontologies...
and epistemologies are constituted and validated within and outside academia” (Disclaimer, 2016). This platform aims to counter dominant narratives and perspectives on design. In their editorial statement they write, “to date, mainstream design discourse has been dominated by a focus on Anglocentric/Eurocentric ways of seeing, knowing, and acting in the world, with little attention being paid to alternative and marginalized discourses from the non Anglo-European sphere, or the nature and consequences of design-as-politics today. This narrowness of horizons and deficiency in criticality is a reflection of the limitations of the institutions within which design is studied and practiced, as well as of the larger socio-political systems that design is institutionally integrated into.” (Editorial, 2016).

Although some scholars may claim that Are we human?, because of its popular tone and unscientific format, cannot be considered as design history proper, it does in fact reproduce a set of references that are unquestionably familiar to the horizons of canonised design history. In what remains, I will explore how the question of humanity is positioned in the discourse of design history.

4. The we in the know and the powers that be

According to Colomina and Wigley, the relationship between humanity and design is simple: “Design always presents itself as serving the human but its real ambition is to redesign the human. The history of design is therefore a history of evolving conceptions of the human. To talk about design is to talk about the state of our species” (p. 9). The book is full of such sweeping, provocative statements. The question Are we human? prompts two counter-questions in return: Who is we? and What is human? The we in the book remains undefined. But clearly, the we is not just any we. While it arguably functions here as a rhetorical device – as a way to create intimacy between the authors and the reader – the we seems also to target an audience of people that are already in the know about design and its specific canon. The examples given in the book are by well-known designers, but some of these examples are not necessarily their best-known works. It seems as if Colomina and Wigley want to rewrite the established canon in such a way that it is interesting to those who already are design literates. The examples given are almost exclusively European and American. There are a few exceptions. For example, in the chapter on the human species, the authors argue that the origins of homo sapiens and its predecessors are located in Africa, which is accompanied by the somewhat ironic observation that, “The human is not a European invention after all” (p. 68). Or, when discussing measuring systems, the Indian Vastu Shastra is mentioned as an ideal system for proportions (p. 149). Another example is an image of the Algerian nudes that Le Corbusier allegedly was obsessed with (p. 190). The rest of the book, however, is dedicated to Western design, Western thought, of which the majority is produced by men. Many of the photographs of individuals depict white men and the objects presented are mostly by white male designers or architects. All citations included in the book are by white, Western men and women. This retelling of the history of humanity and design is interwoven with examples from the usual suspects, such as William Morris, Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier, Eileen Gray, Duchamp, Walter Gropius, Charles and Ray Eames, Rem Koolhaas, Siegfried Giedion, Lina Bo Bardi and others. Overall, the book, its content, in text and image and its references, resemble a very specific kind of we, an overly Western, white, male, bourgeois we, and it seems to project this image on their targeted audience as well. Does this we reflect humanity?
5. Man 1 & Man 2 vs. empirical man

Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter is one of the key thinkers problematizing the conceptions of humanism and the human prevalent in Western thought. In her 2003 article Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument she sets out to claim that the “struggle of our times” is the struggle against the overrepresentation of Man. Wynter makes a distinction between the empirical human and (Western bourgeois) Man (p. 260). According to Wynter, there are several conceptualisations that served to transform the earlier figure of the Christian to, first, Man 1 (the secularized, scientific, rational, political subject), and subsequently to Man 2 (the bourgeois homo oeconomicus) (p. 282). The construct of Man comes into being through the negation of different Others: from those races conceptualised as inferior, such as the Indian or the Black in opposition to Man 1 and the poor, the jobless, or the refugee in opposition to Man 2 (p. 266). The result each time is a normalised and very dominant social construct, Man, that, though it represents only one “genre of being human”, is nevertheless institutionalised as representative of humanity (p. 269).

In Are we human? a homogenising sameness is constructed through the use of a rhetorical we, but the questions raised for this we are very specific and stem from the particular mode of being human that belongs to Man 2. We are all human, but some of us are slightly more human than others. The bourgeois, first-world, luxury problems that designers have occupied themselves with for the sake of humanity are plenty, and a corresponding outlook on the world is reproduced by the authors. For example, in describing the new lifestyles that emerge after WWII, Colomina and Wigley argue that “the interior becomes a showroom full of objects. Shock is absorbed through the consumption of design” (p. 100), and that “[t]he evidence of the expansion of the human is the very lightness of modern design as a kind of camping equipment – what Eileen Gray would term le style camping when talking about her own mobile furniture designed for her E1027 house of 1927 and the need for a new kind of domestic interior that addresses human needs” (p. 128). Similarly, on one of the final pages of the book: “Everybody has the fantasy of being an independent producer, self-employed in the permanent project of constructing oneself. Self-design has become the main
responsibility and activity." (p. 273). The human needs of Man2 seem to be of a very specific kind, distinct from that of the empirical human. These examples not only show limited and narrow conceptualisations of what it means to be human, they also display a sheer disinterest in other ways of living and relating to the world, of other urgencies, aesthetics and interests.

6. The epistemological legacy of modernity/coloniality: universalism

In a recent issue of Design Philosophy Papers, the decolonial thinker Madina Tlostanova states that “the sensing and thinking subject, which is Western/Northern by default, occupies a delocalized and disembodied vantage point that eliminates other possible ways to produce, transmit and represent knowledge, allowing for a worldview to be built on a rigid essentialist modern/colonial model that hides its locality and represents itself as universal and natural” (Tlostanova 2017, p. 52). The modern/colonial model refers to an idea posited by Walter Mignolo in his book The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options (2011). Mignolo explains how modernity and coloniality work in tandem; according to Mignolo, modernity could only come into existence because of coloniality. Decolonial scholars such as Tlostanova, Mignolo and Anibal Quijano theorize persistent domination exercised through colonialism as coloniality, which plays out on different axes, including, notably, the epistemological: “the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectivised expression, intellectual or visual” (Quijano 2007, p. 169). The production of knowledge in Western thought does not acknowledge pluriversality, which entails “a coexistence, correlation and interaction of many intersecting non-abstract universal and countless options grounded in the geopolitics and corpopolitics of knowledge, being and perception” (Tlostanova 2017, p. 54). There are a multitude of concepts that most people in the West are not aware of, and when they are addressed, these ideas are more often than not considered to be traditional, primitive, exotic, nonsensical, spiritual, and so on. Other ways of knowing and being are hardly taken seriously. Are we human? shows little awareness of any world beyond the specific perspective of the Western, white, bourgeois human or beyond Western modernist design history. This is how modernity/coloniality plays out: it suppresses any form of thinking, making, doing, being human, relating to the body, relating to design, materiality, that does not adhere to modernist design epistemology, or anything that is produced by it. Instead, an epistemological hierarchy is reproduced in which Western thinking always takes the moral high ground. And because of its inherited superiority, Western thinkers are not even trained to question the Eurocentrism that allows them to make universalist claims.

The design historian Tony Fry reminds us that “our collective actions in the coming decades and centuries will determine whether our species, as a finite being, is going to be reduced or extended, whether we will survive or die” (p. 103). And he urges us, both designers and thinkers, to rethink the practices of design: to undo the violent and destructive logic of coloniality and capitalism and instead focus on sustainment and futuring, which he understands as the “project of a culture of modesty and thoughtfulness” (Fry 2012, p. 238). According to Fry, only then can we start to become human through design. In Design in the Borderlands (2014), edited by Fry and design scholar Eleni Kalantidou, a series of essays present more concrete case studies and alternative understandings of design and design epistemologies around the world.

7. Posthumanism – extending Man’s term at the office?

The book allegedly traces a history of humanity and design that ends with posthumanism and the anthropocene. “Human design eventually redesigns the human. We are gradually redesigned by our tools” (p. 36). If the world and its atmosphere are, like the human species itself, increasingly influenced and designed by humans, in what ways can humans still be considered to be just one species among many? Posthumanist attempts to abandon the anthropocentric distinction between the human and the rest of the world have produced scholarly discourse on cyborgs, robotics, artificial intelligence and climate change, among other concerns. However, what is problematic in such work, according to critics like Sylvia Wynter, is that many posthumanists are quick to make grand statements for all of humanity. These critics argue that humanity has been denied for so long to the majority of the people in the world: to minorities, non-white people, women, the poor, refugees. Disguised as a discourse aimed at addressing the ethics of
living in the world, the output of most posthumanist scholars fails to acknowledge the very limited conceptions of the human that have predominated throughout Western history. Neil Badmington, in his book *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within* (2004), states that “there is nothing more terrifying than a posthumanism that claims to be terminating Man while actually extending his term in office” (Badmington, p. 117). This critique can only be understood through coloniality/modernity and the power dynamics present within the construction of Man1 and Man2; it was a specific part of humanity that set into motion the colonisation of land and people, the industrial revolution and the extraction of the Earth. Moreover, while it is true that the Anthropocene impacts all of humankind around the globe, the effects of climate change are unequally distributed. The authors of *Are we human?*, like many Western scholars, are not interested in understanding the empirical human or the politics of the human as they have emerged in the course of humanism and the transition from Man1 to Man 2, and instead jump too quickly to the homogenization of all humanity, making assumptions on behalf of all of us.

**8. We have never been human**

*Are we human? Notes on an archaeology of design* may not necessarily be your average design classic or even meant as design history per se, but it echoes the well-established canonical examples common to design history. Written from a Western, Eurocentric, white, bourgeois perspective, it fails to acknowledge its positionality and instead universalizes the white/Western gaze as the norm for humanity. It does so not only in its conceptualisation of humanity but also in its understanding of design. Who gets to be recognized as a human? Who gets to be recognized as a human that designs or as a human worth designing for? What designs are considered relevant? Through Wynter’s conceptualisation of Man1 and Man2, humanism and humanity are problematised and the mechanisms of exclusion at work on multiple levels are made legible. The book presents itself as an archaeology of design, echoing Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge, aiming to reveal the historical context conditions that validated particular approaches and understandings of design in relation to a certain aspect of being human.
It thus understands itself to be exploring the discursive formations of humanity and design throughout history, yet, as we have seen it does so only from a very specific perspective. Taking into consideration that Are we human? was published in the context of the 3rd Istanbul Design Biennial, it is all the more troublesome that it conveys such a strong Eurocentric and American approach to design, given that Turkey itself has a longstanding history of design research (Bayazit, 2009). The low number of Turkish participants in the biennial (ArchDaily, 2016) gives rise to the question of whether the entire biennial was perhaps thought up, planned and pre-packaged in New York and then transplanted to Istanbul. The situation is perhaps symptomatic of the invasion of positivist and imperialist design-thinking, as well as of the globalized gentrifying force of biennial culture.

When we thought we had departed from modernism, Bruno Latour reminded us that “we [had] never been modern”. Similarly, this book reminds us, upon critical rereading that we have never been human. I want to argue that we need to continuously re-examine and challenge the canon and the traditional approaches to design history if we want to dismantle the reproduction of the normative gaze produced by eurocentrism and universalism, even when, or particularly when concealed in seductive book design. I am not proposing the absolute dismissal of canonical Western design history as such. However, what I am opposed to is the denial of different genres of being human and of doing design. To end with Fanon: “Let us reconsider the question of mankind. Let us reconsider the question of cerebral reality and of the cerebral mass of all humanity, whose connexions must be increased, whose channels must be diversified and whose messages must be re-humanized” (Fanon 1963, p. 313).

Bibliographic references


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1. Italics are mine.↵

2. To take into account the design of design history books seems to be fundamental – any design historian would probably agree that the form in which a collection of design historical knowledge itself is presented, designed and marketed will undeniably influence the perception of it and will define who will read it.↵

3. The platform was founded in 2016 by Ahmed Ansari, Danah Abdulla, Ece Canli, Mahmoud Keshavarz, Matthew Kiern, Pedro Oliveira, Luiza Prado and Tristan Schultz.↵

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giovanni klaus koenig e l'approccio semiotico al design

Isabella Patti

Giovanni Klaus Koenig was a conservative and nonconformist critic and historian, capable of counterbalancing a lucid moral severity to an ironic language with which he tells the story of design not only from the new corner of semiotics but also through a popular anecdotal macro. His theoretical book Il design è un pipistrello: 1/2 topo e 1/2 uccello published posthumously with an introduction by Giuseppe Lotti and Egidio Mucci in 1995, collects part of his best essays: the reading reflects the mind of Koenig in all its versatility. As Tomás Maldonado recalled a few years ago, “Koenig’s very strong verbal invective and polemic was a simplification of the popular type of his thought, of extraordinarily easy impact” (Brizzi, Di Cintio, Segoni, & Terpolilli, 1997) and this emerges strongly from the book: the ease in exposing complex facts in a simple and lively way, the need to dissociate the culture of design from the idealistic legacy of Croce through a direct language, his passion in restoring concreteness, reality and materiality to the history. Koenig remains an important reference for the comparison between design and its linguistic and communicative values, and in the application of a method of analysis of objects that adopts the point of view of structuring their meaning over time.

Questo articolo è disponibile in Italiano

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1. Il video-documento illustrativo intitolato I maestri dell’architettura e del design – Giovanni Klaus Koenig (Brizzi, Di Cintio, Segoni, & Terpolilli, 1997), riporta interviste, esperienze e ricordi di molti di coloro che collaborarono con Koenig dal 1965 in poi come Pierluigi Spadolini, Bruno Zevi, Umberto Eco, Alessandro Mendini, Roberto Segoni.↵

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design histories through and from sources
After over four years of publication (the first issue came out in March 2013), *AIS/Design. Storia e Ricerche* celebrates its tenth issue by again featuring – following a series of monograph issues – research studies covering a range of themes. Yet in this case, there is a common thread tying the heterogeneous topics together: methodological considerations on the study and use of primary sources.

As we wrote in the call we launched a year ago, we felt it was appropriate to focus attention back on the historian’s primary working tools, sources and archives, at a time in which we are witnessing an apparently contradictory set of phenomena and trends in the field of historical elaboration and analysis.

While on the one hand, we observe that the narrative dimension is beginning to prevail in the ways that historical events are reconstructed and presented to the public, in a search for greater legibility and a more immediate and emotional involvement of the reader, on the other hand, the relationship with the sources has been immeasurably transformed and enriched, at least in terms of power, by digital technology in particular, which is contributing new tools and stimuli to research work. Offering access to a greater quantity and variety of sources, the digital remediation of documents and materials of various kinds, generated on different types of media, opens new possibilities for exploring and using them, but also calls for a reflection on their interpretation.

This is a time in which historians are advancing across an expanded geography of resources, a landscape of sources ranging from specificity to uniformity in which the challenge, at least for design history, of diversifying the tools and more significantly the methodologies, remains to be clarified and addressed. The questions of method most certainly concern the nature of the digital sources – both those produced by a process of digitization and native digital sources – but the debate also touches upon other typologies of sources that are relatively less attended to, or better, not yet systemized by the historiography of design, such as oral sources, the characteristics of which are quite different from linguistic and written media, or audio or video recordings.

Naturally, the ambition of this issue is not to address each and every one of these problems. Titled “Design histories through and from the sources”, it brings to light in each of the articles a critical reflection on the materials themselves, on their variety, their accessibility or relative inaccessibility. In other words, what we asked the authors to do was to highlight the tools they worked with and the role they played in shaping their research, in an effort to recombine method and content, underscoring the role of the sources in historical research.

For this reason, many of the articles published here share a self-reflecting approach; several authors have used their own investigations as case studies, opening a series of windows onto pragmatic or methodological, operational or conceptual issues in historiographic work. This is the case with the essays by Bahar Emgin, Ida Kamilla Lie, Paola Proverbio, Eleonora Charans, Chiara Lecce, Marta Sironi, Luciana Gunetti and those of Elena Dellapiana, Tanja Marzi and Federica Stella. Their essays offer ideas and references – borrowed from various disciplines, such as architectural history, philology, archival studies, public history, oral history, Actor Network Theory – that confirm the need to continue expanding the horizons for the study of design history, and at the same time to systemize adequate approaches and practices. The article by Dario Scodeller moves in the same direction, concentrating on issues related to the digitization of sources.

Overall, the articles provide a significant sampler of the ways in which the analysis of primary sources can offer new perspectives on the history of design; methodological and operational ideas and opportunities deriving from the heterogeneity of the sources and media, and from the tools used to analyse them; the typologies of sources that may be used to study the different histories of design (in various national contexts); the role of the people involved in the processes of preservation, selection, use and interpretation of the sources, from the historians to the people responsible for the archives, to the designers themselves.
This issue also includes a review of Victor Margolin’s *World History of Design* – as well as the first online editorial platform by Bloomsbury Publishing – https://www.bloomsburydesignlibrary.com/ – and a review of two recent exhibitions dedicated to the history of La Rinascente department store, organized in Milan and in Chiasso, Switzerland, for its one-hundredth anniversary.

Finally, Claudia Collina, a civil servant specialized in the Cultural Heritage, illustrates the premises and results of a wide-ranging research study on various typologies of museums and collections featuring design objects, found in the cultural institutions of the Emilia-Romagna region.

The publication of our tenth issue offers us the opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to the growth of the magazine, to thank our team, all of whom have made it possible, on a voluntary basis, to achieve this result. We also take this opportunity to pledge our commitment to the future.

Raimonda Riccini, Fiorella Bulegato, Maddalena Dalla Mura, Carlo Vinti

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**traces of peter muller-munk associates in the history of industrial design in turkey**

Bahar Emgin

This article is based on a wider research study on the handicraft development programme conceived by Peter Muller-Munk Associates in the second half of the 1950s in Turkey. The aim is to document the progress and outcomes of the programme and to reveal the archival research practices involved in the research. To this end, records of major governmental and professional U.S. institutions, located in the National Archives and Records Administration at College Park (Maryland) and Special Collections Research Center at Syracuse University Libraries, are analysed to elucidate the context within which the project took place, as well as its preliminary preparations, project proposals, work plans, problems and termination. The article concludes by discussing the relevance of the findings to the broader study of the advancement of industrial design in developing countries.

1. Introduction

Studies on the historical development of industrial design as a professional field in Turkey mark the design aid program conducted by Peter Muller-Munk Associates in the second half of the 1950s as the moment that introduced the country into the concept of industrial design, while also acknowledging its ultimate failure (Balcioğlu and Emgin, 2014; Düzakin, 2000; Er, Korkut, Er, 2003). According to Er, Korkut & Er (2003), who provide a general overview of the project by describing its context and objectives, Peter Muller-Munk Associates was assigned by the International Cooperation Administration (ICA) of the U.S. government as part of a comprehensive technical aid program to be implemented in various developing countries in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East by several design agencies. In line with the program’s broader aim, representatives from Peter Muller-Munk Associates dealt in Turkey with improving traditional craft products, including ceramics, meerschaum and copperware, so as to introduce them to the international market (Er et al., 2003, p. 26). The story in the literature ends abruptly at this point by noting its failure. However, this unexplored failure leaves many unanswered questions regarding the scope, organization, execution, actors and complications of the project.

This article derives from a wider research project I conduct to uncover details of the design aid program, its failure and its possible influence on the development of design in
Turkey. In what follows, I share the initial findings of the archival research and shed light on the research process that led to the particular outcomes presented here. Thus, I aim at both documenting the experience of Peter Muller-Munk Associates in Turkey and “opening the black box” (Stanley, 2017) of the research work beyond it.

The manual and intellectual labor process involved in archival studies has attracted a good deal of attention in the last decade from various social science disciplines (Kirsch & Rohan, 2008; L’Eplattenier, 2009; Moore et al., 2017) in order to end the “silence” of researchers regarding their archival practices (Stanley, 2017). In this growing literature, scholars point out the necessity of reflecting on the practical strategies of archival research and revealing the what, how and why of research practices. The repertoire of contributions is considered as both a guide for novice archival researchers and a place for the experienced to develop a more elaborate theoretical and methodological framework to study and understand archives. L’Eplattenier (2009) suggests that a “methods section” added to studies based on archival research processes would help in constructing a body of work on primary research methods. As L’Eplattenier further notes, “methods sections” would bring the research process into the open by describing “the pragmatic goals, issues and actions of […] archival research.” In this way, “methods sections” would not only endow the work with credibility but also expose the “cracks, fissures and gaps” that create limitations (L’Eplattenier, 2009, p. 74). In light of these discussions, I see my introduction of “the pragmatic components involved in obtaining the materials that are the foundation” (L’Eplattenier, 2009, p. 71) of my study as an essential part of this article. I therefore begin by clarifying how I found the research subject, how and where I located the primary sources, how many collections I examined, what the content of the records was and how I read them.

2. Method

My interest in Peter Muller-Munk Associates’ visit to Turkey was stimulated by the recognition that it had been covered almost exclusively as an anecdote in the literature, as the following brief account suggests:

In 1955, Peter Müller-Munk [sic] Associates was assigned by ICA to help Turkey, along with India and Israel, to raise the quality of their craft products. Peter Müller-Munk and designers from his firm visited Turkey several times in 1956 and 1957. […] However, this ICA assignment in Turkey—as in the majority of ICA assignments in other developing countries—was not successful. It was, on the other hand, the first known initiative to create an awareness of industrial design in the Turkish context. (Er et al., 2003, p. 26)

The significant gaps in this story raised a succession of questions. Why would such an important incident, identified as Turkey’s first acquaintance with the concept and practice of design, be summarized so briefly? Who were these designers who visited Turkey several times over two years? What were the scope and objectives of their project? What was the plan? How did it proceed? Who were the Turkish counterparts in the project? Why did the project fail? What was it that they failed to accomplish? What traces did they leave behind?

The answers to these questions must have been hidden in somewhere. But where? These questions entailed others. From where would I begin the search? In what forms did the primary sources exist? What were the ways to identify them? I felt like I had encountered the “black box” of archival research.

Before finding a way out from this dead-end, I needed to continue investigating secondary sources. In doing so, I was trying to compensate for my lack of practical knowledge of historical research, as an industrial designer by education. I was particularly focusing extensively on the bibliographies of the works that I had been consulting. My journey towards the archives was initiated in this way, with two studies in particular providing the most guidance. One was a biographical study of Peter Muller-Munk by Rachel Delphia and Jewel Stern (2016) and the other was a study by Emre Gönlügür (2015) of how the American way of life was promoted in the American pavilions at the İzmir International Fair during the 1950s. Both sources helped me take the major step of initiating the research by indicating two major archives to delve into. The former pointed at the records of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) as a useful resource while latter made me aware of the National Archives and Records
Administration (NARA), which contained records of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies that had conducted non-military foreign aid programs. The present article is built on the research conducted in these two major archives, which document the American side of the story. The traces of the Turkish side also began to come in sight during this time in the American archives. I collected a good amount of information regarding the Turkish institutions and people involved in the project. However, except from a few major reports this article excludes the records of Turkish institutions since the research on them is still in progress.

I began by working on the NARA’s records, which “is the U.S. Government’s collection of documents that records important events in American History” (see “What’s an Archives?” August 15, 2016, https://www.archives.gov/about/info/whats-an-archives.html). It is a vast collection of documents from several centuries prepared by various government agencies. The documents are organized into “numbered record groups, with each record group comprising the records of a major government entity, usually a bureau or an independent agency” (see “Record Group Concept,” August 23, 2016, https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/index-numeric/concept.html).

NARA offers practical online search and research tools to survey the collections. I used the online catalog to make a keyword search and the list of possible research topics containing links to information about particular research groups (see https://www.archives.gov/research/topics). This survey of holdings directed me to the collection of the ICA’s documents, gathered under the “Records of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies (RG 469)”. I surveyed around twenty boxes that contained contracts, project status reports, memoranda, briefing papers and correspondence like circulars, aerograms and telegrams.

The second major resource, the IDSA records, is located at Syracuse University Libraries Special Collections Research Center. The records include “office files from predecessor industrial design organizations (ASID, IDI) as well as files from IDSA itself” in the form of bound materials, printed matter and audio-visual material (see http://library.syr.edu/digital/guides/id/ida.htm#d2e105). The collection’s content can be searched through an online inventory, which offers a list of materials arranged by topic. I worked on files from a total of 8 boxes, arranged under topics or titles including “foreign affairs”, “government relations”, “correspondences”, “newsletters”, “United States Department of State”, “foreign design groups” and “trade fairs”.

The materials from these two institutional archives were later complemented by the documents from the unofficial “archives” of Peter Muller-Munk Associates. This was a personal archive kept by a former employee of the company with a vast range of files from company projects. Since it has not yet been classified, indexed and made accessible to researchers, Rachel Delphia personally helped me access relevant files regarding the company’s mission to Turkey. The materials derived from the unofficial PMMA archives include images of the products, samples and models designed and/or collected in the course of the project, and a number of press clippings, including news about the project from both the U.S. and Turkey. Compared to the other two archives, this source was richer in information about outcomes than the organization itself. In this respect, it helped substantially in filling a major gap.

Apart from these archival documents, I referred to newspapers, institutional and professional publications of the period as other types of primary sources. I found Newspapers.com served as an efficient engine for identifying the news regarding the ICA design aid project in the U.S. The site contains “200+ million pages of historical newspapers from 5,000+ newspapers from around the United States and beyond” (see https://www.newspapers.com/about). In addition to newspaper articles, I scanned the Industrial Activities Bulletin of the ICA and the journals Industrial Design and Craft Horizons.

In brief, I began my survey and analysis of these resources by compiling a list of primary and secondary sources after an extensive literature review. The preliminary preparation was not limited to appropriating bibliographies of secondary sources but also included surveying and mapping the collections anew to identify additional materials, which created extensive lists of resources to investigate. I then began to copy relevant documents, which I reviewed repeatedly each time for a different purpose. I took various notes to identify the people involved and their roles, create an organizational scheme of the project (Figure 1), produce a timetable (Figure 2), designate key themes and specify
lists of new keywords for further searches. In this respect, my archival research was substantially a work of “archigraphy” or “writing the archive,” as Stanley (2017) would define it.

Drawing on de Certeau, Stanley (2017, p. 35) argues that the crucial activity that underlies archival research is “writing, with the researcher actively engaged with secondary sources and primary (archival) documents by rewriting aspects of these in their notes, summaries, transcribed quotations and so on”. Thus, writing is the essential activity for a researcher to make sense of, interpret and frame the primary materials at hand. It refers to both “the different kinds of rewriting that are carried out, in scribbling notes, making quotes from secondary sources, transcribing documents; and also different kinds of writing ‘proper’” (Stanley, 2017, p. 35); namely, the outcomes of research in the form of various scholarly texts. The rest of the article consists of what I wrote out of my inquiry into the primary resources mentioned above.

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Fig. 1 – Draft of the organizational scheme of Turkish Handicraft Development Office drawn from the notes taken from several correspondences and reports.

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Fig. 2 – Timeline of events re-written after reviewing the primary sources at hand.

3. The beginning
In early 1957, the magazine *Industrial Design* proudly announced the new political and diplomatic missions assigned to renowned American designers by the U.S. Department of State (Fleishman, 1957; Fiske Mitarachi, 1957). These assignments were part of trade fair and technical aid programs initiated within the Mutual Security Program. As Fleishman (1957, p. 46) clearly put it, the overall objective of the program was to stimulate the development of allied underdeveloped countries and “increase the standard of living of the man-on-the-street […] to give him a better chance of living a productive life free of the allure of communist ideology.” To this end, the ICA, the agency responsible for organizing and implementing foreign aid programs, searched for a wide-ranging plan to integrate these countries into the international market, thinking that this would catalyze the development of their production and economy (Fleishman, 1957, p. 46).

The program appeared to be grounded in Cold War U.S. efforts to promote an abundant consumer market as key to freedom, prosperity, advancement and the peaceful integration of allies against the communist bloc. Within this context, design was gaining prominence as an effective tool to propagate the development of local capitalist markets in the developing world and their articulation into the international market. Designers’ abilities of product differentiation and marketing were exploited to create and display the American way of life while “the talents of designer as coordinator, analyst and trade consultant” (“The Designer as,” 1956, p. 72) were offered as the catalysts of desired development in countries receiving technical assistance. As intergovernmental correspondence reveals, at the heart of the design aid proposal was the idea to “provide personal services in design, processes, materials, marketing and packaging for handicraft and village industry products.”

Although the initial intention was to advance production techniques and introduce stylistic improvements to make local products appealing to foreign markets, expanding the domestic market of locally-designed consumer goods was also on the agenda. Industrial designers were seen as the experts who would carry out the program with the help of their marketing and management experience. The plan was to work with qualified designers who could “evaluate local production, draft product designs, work up production plans, and finished sketches, and suggest materials, and recommend distribution methods.” It was also considered essential “to utilize existing productive equipment, domestic resources and materials, and the local manufacture of hand tools and larger equipment.”

Armed with this agenda, the Foreign Operations Administration contacted the Society of Industrial Designers to ask for the services of its member design consultant agencies. The government scheduled the program to start in the summer of 1955 in a number of countries in the Near East, Far East, Africa and Latin America, with Israel identified as the first country to collaborate. Participant firms were asked to appoint a team of at least two “to survey local requirements, determine effective methods of rendering assistance, and carry out demonstrations and training activities.” The survey would review production conditions, available resources and marketing possibilities in cooperation with local institutions like trade associations, cooperatives and marketing firms. The survey would be followed by design, production and marketing consultancy whereby participant designers would develop designs to be produced by local craftsmen, suggest possible materials and supplies, help standardize product quality, facilitate advancement of tools and materials, guide their acquisition and establish connections with potential markets. The program was estimated to last around a year.

Following negotiations, five renowned industrial design companies were assigned by the ICA to nineteen countries. The contracts included Russel Wright Associates’ mission to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam; Walter Dorwin Teague Associates’ mission to Greece, Jordan and Lebanon; Design Research Incorporated’s mission to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Mexico, Surinam, El Salvador, Jamaica and Costa Rica; Peter Muller-Munk Associates’ mission to Israel, Turkey and India; and Smith, Scherr and McDermott’s mission to South Korea (Pulos, 1988, pp. 236-237). The design teams did not implement their projects simultaneously or follow similar routes; rather, the programs in each country were shaped by its particular economic conditions, production capacities, established craft traditions and political agendas. As for Turkey, the project was brought onto the agenda at the end of 1956. U.S. officials saw Turkey as a
democratic Middle Eastern country in which the proposed development could achieve significant outcomes. Before proceeding to discuss the details of the program, it is crucial to outline the economic, social and cultural background that foregrounded Turkey as a promising geography regarding the aims of the program.

4. The background

The political, social, cultural and economic atmosphere of Turkey in the 1950s was marked by the transition to multi-party democracy and the resulting Democrat Party (DP) government. As a right-wing political party, DP positioned the country as “a capitalist and anti-communist stronghold,” particularly through its policies encouraging urbanization and agricultural modernization (Örnek & Üngör, 2013, p. 6). DP’s policies also brought Turkey closer to the U.S. in the ideological divisions of the Cold War, which found its greatest expression in the party’s desire “to transform Turkey into a ‘little America’” (Örnek & Üngör, 2013, p. 6). Actually, Turkey’s alignment with the U.S. had commenced earlier, in 1948, during the Republican People’s Party (RPP) government, when the country began to receive Marshall Aid, or even earlier in 1946 with the arrival of the U.S. warship SS Missouri in Istanbul. The alliance strengthened further after Turkey joined NATO in 1952, which definitively located Turkey within the Western bloc in the Cold War (Örnek & Üngör, 2013, pp. 5-6).

Meanwhile, Turkey’s economic policies were also being shaped in accordance with its alliance with the capitalist West, with World War II being decisive in introducing a liberal economic transformation. This began in 1947 in response to rising opposition to existing statist policies from Turkey’s commercial bourgeoisie and industrialists, who had grown stronger as an economic and social actor during the war (Zürcher, 2007, p. 312). Besides, the growing capitalist world economy’s tendency towards free trade and criticisms by foreign experts made Turkey more open to American investment, assistance and credit (Boratav, 2008, pp. 96-100). Hence, between 1946 and 1953, inward-looking protectionist economic policies were replaced by more liberal, foreign market and import oriented policies. However, due to an increasing foreign trade deficit, this ended in 1954 with the introduction of import substitution industrialization (ISI) policies (Boratav, 2008, pp. 107-108).

Alpay Er (1997) argues that governments in developing countries like Turkey have indirectly influenced the emergence and development of design practice through such economic and development policies, with ISI policies proving particularly effective in opening the way for the introduction of the concept of design. Yet, at this point, the actors were far from realizing the potential of design for implementing ISI policies and conceptualized design more as a cultural practice than a commercial one (Er, 1997, p. 302).

The technical aid proposal for Turkey was quite promising in terms of introducing the commercial capabilities of design practice to create a domestic mass market for consumer goods. The priority of the proposed program was raising people’s living standards, particularly the rural population that constituted the main workforce of the handicraft industry. In addition, “development of small cottage industries and handicraft activities, to provide much needed consumer essentials, reduce the needs for imports, and hopefully, create some productive capacity for export” was foregrounded as one of the projects that would comply with the objectives.

The Turkish government also approached the handicraft industry in a similar manner. Its approval of the craft development program was a concrete step in its long-term efforts to advance Turkey’s craft industry. Indeed, the issue had been on the agenda almost since the establishment of the republic, with the search for solutions traceable back to The First Handicraft Exhibition and Manufactural Arts Congress, held in 1936 at the initiative of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce. In his comprehensive account of the event, Serkan Tuna (2004, p. 184) describes the exhibition as an attempt at examining the condition of local handicraft industries and determining possible measures to be taken for their enhancement. The exhibition attracted a good deal of attention from individual artisans and institutions, such as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Turkish Red Crescent, the Girls Art Institute, the Society of Weavers, the Society of Shoe Makers and the Academy of Fine Arts (Tuna, 2004, p. 194). The exhibition was followed by a congress at which new laws for regulating handicraft industries were negotiated.
Deputies and representatives of craftsmen worked in different committees to discuss common issues like credit problems, legal issues and education, in addition to commissions to investigate the problems of particular branches like clay and stone goods, textiles, leather working and printing (Tuna, 2004, pp. 204-205). The resulting report of the Ministry of Commerce was influential in creating a framework for the suggestions and approaches. The report considered that crafts and small-scale industry were indispensable components of industrial development, and highlighted their role in representing national culture and providing socio-economic balance (Tuna, 2004, p. 206). The measures proposed to defend the craft industry included legislation regarding institutionalization, formation of cooperatives, taxation, education and professional practice. In addition, the state was commissioned to support the marketing and sales of craft products (Tuna, 2004, pp. 208-209).

However, the law proposed at the end of the congress was never fully implemented; instead, the issues remained unresolved for two decades. In 1957, the Turkish Employment Service of the Ministry of Labor prepared *A Report on the Requirement and Establishment of a Handicraft and Small-Scale Industry Technology Center*. This report was the outcome of a number of meetings since 1956 between numerous relevant ministries and institutions, such as the Ministries of Economy and Commerce, Education and Foreign Relations, the Chamber of Commerce, Halkbank and Sümerbank, the Turkish Standards Institution, the Faculty of Agriculture and the Turkish Employment Service. Like the earlier congress, this report considered the handicraft industry from a developmentalist perspective, emphasizing its potential for stimulating rural reconstruction. As well as emphasizing the economic and political benefits, it was also crucial for the proposed plan to evaluate the stylistic qualities and market appeal of existing craft products. In particular, since it was seen as essential for villagers to acquire the ability to produce products that addressed urban tastes and needs, the report recommended the “procurement of necessary tools and materials, creation of sales opportunities, identification of the most favorable samples, supply of education and training tools.”

In short, both political parties viewed the efficient reconstruction of the handicraft industry as a catalyzer of Turkey’s industrialization and development. This included both stylistic improvements to existing products in line with modernist aesthetics and the advancement of production techniques and capacity. Both the American and Turkish participants viewed these improvements as a means to ensure Turkey’s social and economic well-being since increased productivity would enable the efficient use of labor, create a profitable occupation for rural workers and stimulate a flourishing domestic mass market for consumer goods.

5. The proposed program

Negotiations with the design agency regarding Turkey’s craft development program began in the context of these efforts by both foreign and domestic actors. Peter Muller-Munk Associates was contracted by the ICA for the Small Industry – Product Development, Improvement, and Marketing project in Turkey in 1955. The contract expected the firm to “spend about one-fourth of assigned time to design work proper; the major amount of project time is devoted to market evaluation, product development, technical assistance in placing recommended designs into production, and marketing and distribution arrangements.” The ICA expected Peter Muller-Munk Associates with a staff member to begin by surveying Turkey’s manual and handicraft industries. Before coming to Turkey to conduct the survey, Peter Muller-Munk and his team received a briefing document from the Turkish Employment Service in December 1955. This outlined the state of crafts in different regions in Turkey and made some suggestions for the design team’s consideration. The report defined craft production largely as a rural trade while noting the predominance of archaic production methods and the need for mechanization in many branches. The report also mentioned that most craft production targeted a very limited local market and was hence considered as an unprofitable business. The proposed solutions focused on turning certain craft activities into profitable businesses for Turkey’s rural population, with hand embroidery, Istanbul spoon making, pottery, ceramic work, copper working, gilding, carpet making, weaving and mother-of-pearl work indicated as having commercial potential. Paul Karlen and Robert Renaud of Peter Muller-Munk Associates arrived in Turkey on
December 16, 1955 for the survey. As they reported, the designers' visit was organized by the Turkish Ministry of Economy and Commerce and the U.S. Operations Mission to Turkey (Karlen & Renault, 1956, pp. 7-8). They traveled around Turkey for twenty two days, visiting Ankara, Hacibektas, Kayseri, Nevsehir, Adana, Antakya, Gaziantep, Konya, Isparta, Burdur, Denizli, Izmir, Demirci, Kütahya, Eskişehir, Bursa, Umurbey, İstanbul, Kartal, Bolu and Amasra, to observe and analyze the problems faced by Turkish craftsmen regarding product design and development, production techniques and marketing. After reviewing the situation of various crafts, including carpet making, weaving, basketry, ceramics and tile making, furniture, leather working and meerschaum carving, the designers prepared a preliminary proposal for a craft development program. The project's two main objectives were increasing production volume and earning foreign currency (Karlen & Renault, 1956, p. 9). To achieve this, the proposal recommended establishing cooperatives of craftsmen to plan and increase production, creating high-quality products to address the needs and tastes of foreign markets, and organizing marketing and distribution channels through advertising campaigns. The designers based their program on two key points. First, the program should lead to the production of both functional objects for daily use and decorative accessories with high aesthetic appeal. Second, the competitive power of Turkish products should rely on the quality of craftsmanship than price because Turkey’s production capacity was so limited at this point (Karlen & Renault, 1956, pp. 43-44).

Having determined the goals of the project and provided a comprehensive analysis of the situation of various craft activities, the two designers identified five major crafts for the program to concentrate on: coppersmithing, basketry, woodwork, ceramics and meerschaum carving. Copper was highlighted as the backbone of the program because of its potential to bring in foreign currency, given that Turkey was rich in copper and had talented coppersmiths, yet still relied on exporting raw copper. The designers therefore recommended increasing export revenues from copper by encouraging the export of copperware. However, the proposal also suggested designing products that combined different materials, such as copper and basketwork lampshades or furniture combining copper, woodwork and basketwork (Karlen & Renault, 1956, pp. 45-47).

6. The work plan

Following their survey report, Peter Muller-Munk Associates staff delivered a work plan in April 1956, aiming to complete the project in two phases. The first phase was dedicated to developing the above mentioned five fields of handicrafts (Karlen & Renault, 1956, p. 48). Peter Muller-Munk Associates staff was in charge of the entire first phase, which was also divided into three stages: design of new products, establishment of the Handicraft Development Board and the study of marketing strategies.

The design phase was preceded by a comprehensive market analysis in which American designers would analyze competing products and determine a possible market for Turkish handicrafts (Karlen & Renault, 1956, pp. 68-69). The design team would first travel to Rome, Milan, Zurich, Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen and Paris to examine the successful handicraft products they offered to the market and then to Montreal, Toronto, Quebec, Boston, New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, San Francisco and Los Angeles to discover promising markets. The survey's focus would be on the range of available products in the market, their prices, marketing and quotation strategies, retailing alternatives and ways of distribution. An essential part of this phase was to collect a variety of products to be used as samples when developing original design concepts for Turkish products.

In the following step, American designers at the design quarters of Peter Muller-Munk Associates in Pittsburgh would develop 150 original product ideas, including trays, tables, lampshades, folding screens, tables, jugs, candlesticks, picnic baskets, cigarette and jewelry boxes, trash cans, cutlery and crockery. After this, Turkish craftsmen would produce a selection of 100 items under the supervision of Peter Muller-Munk Associates staff (Karlen & Renault, 1956, pp. 69-70).

Once the samples had been produced, the Handicraft Development Board would be established in the second phase. The plan suggested turning the board into a Turkish governmental institution. Therefore, its recommended permanent members should include representatives from the Ministry of Economy and Commerce as the head, the
Ministry of Labor and the Confederation of Turkish Tradesmen and Craftsmen (Karlen & Renault, 1956, p. 70). Representatives of the American mission and Peter Muller-Munk Associates would become temporary members of the board who would leave once the handicraft development program was completed. In the short-term, the board was responsible for organizing the craftsmen involved in the first phase of the program into cooperatives and creating the means to pay for their work. In the long-term, a committee would be established, responsible for providing, exploring and developing materials and coordinating production facilities and standards (Karlen & Renault, 1956, p. 71). The latter included assuring production in quantity, developing a system for quality control, systematizing production, organizing distribution, granting credits, and working on marketing and retailing strategies (Karlen & Renault, 1956, pp. 71-72). The board would also be expected to encourage the sales of craft products through exhibitions in the U.S. and consulate buildings, prepare product catalogues and provide sales personnel (Karlen & Renault, 1956, p. 72).

7. The outcome

On June 28, 1957, Peter Muller-Munk Associates signed a contract with the government of Turkey to implement the proposed plan. A total of $59,000 was allocated from the 1957 budget for the program. Project proceeded as planned in its first year. The Handicraft Development Board established the Turkish Handicraft Development Office in Ankara, co-directed by Robert Renaud of Peter Muller-Munk Associates and Mehmet Ali Oksal (Delphia & Stern, 2016, p. 122). Under these directors was a Turkish staff of around six people as well as Robert Gabriel of Peter Muller-Munk Associates as assistant to Renaud (Delphia & Stern, 2016, p. 122, 124). The Turkish Handicrafts Development Office worked in coordination with fifteen cooperatives dispersed around the country, including cities like Kütahya, Konya, Antep and Eskişehir, to produce the designs prepared in the office (Delphia & Stern, 2016, p. 124).

In his report to the U.S. government almost a year after the contract was signed, Peter Muller-Munk noted that the project was on schedule and that they had already designed and prepared 115 samples. However, the mass production of these samples was left to 1958-1959 when they could also begin to be exported. Among the samples produced were interior accessories like tables, stools, magazine racks, lamps, fireplace accessories, screens, ashtrays, vases, pillow covers and needlework; some hostess and table accessories like trays, shish-kebab skewers, salad sets, pepper mills, mugs, place mats, napkins and towels; some office accessories like letter holders, calendars, mail trays and desk sets; and other various objects like toys, baskets, jewelry, pipes and souvenirs (Figures 3-8).

The failure to begin commercial production of the samples seems to have caused some discontent on both sides of the project. The Turkish government complained that the American experts had prioritized collecting samples from Turkey for their own interests and had not tried to initiate production and market research (Türk El Sanatları, 1962, p. 36). The government also believed that various organizational and granting problems had disrupted the process (Türk El Sanatları, 1962, p. 36). On the other hand, the Americans complained about the orientation of the program. In its initial negotiations with the firm, the U.S. government had made it clear that assistance in producing consumer products for Turkey’s domestic market was a crucial part of the program. However, the officials observed that the production of export items for the international market had been prioritized instead, which made them openly express their doubts about allocating further budget to the project. These growing complaints from both sides led to the termination of the project when, after three years of activity, the Turkish Handicrafts Development Office was closed at the request of the Turkish government (Türk El Sanatları, 1962, p. 69).
Fig. 3 – Turkish Handicraft Development Office showroom, PMMA Archives.

Fig. 4 – Tabletop accessories, PMMA Archives.

Fig. 5 – Vases and candleholders, PMMA Archives.
Fig. 6 – Whirling dervishes, PMMA Archives.

Fig. 7 – Barbecue, PMMA Archives.

Fig. 8 – Furniture, PMMA Archives.
8. Conclusions

The termination of the project without any tangible outcomes caused some displeasure on the Turkish side. Some of the more moderate criticisms focused on the drawbacks of local conditions and incompetence of local producers. For this group, the project was destined to fail because it was badly timed (Türk El Sanatları, 1962, p. 37). However, more adversarial voices claimed that foreign assistance was incompatible with national interests and blamed foreign agents for exclusively protecting their own interests (Türk El Sanatları, 1962, p. 37). Indeed, interviews with program participants indicate that the American designers had even accused of spying, leading to requests for their deportation. Whether true or not, such suspicions reflect the ideological conflicts of Cold War Turkey and remind us that any account of design history, whether national or international, should take into consideration the political, ideological and diplomatic context. It also reminds us that this was not a one-way transfer from the center to the periphery; rather, the recipients of design aid reacted to it in certain ways to meet their own interests and agenda.

There are also other more crucial conclusions to draw from the account given here before quickly inferring that the project failed. The story confirms that this introduction of industrial design to the periphery largely took place within the ideological atmosphere of the Cold War as a matter of industrialization. As Gui Bonsiepe noted, "industrial design constitutes an indispensable instrument for endeavours towards development" in the peripheral countries (cited in Er 1997, p. 295). What Bonsiepe (1977) meant was creating a design practice to address local needs with local resources in place of commercially driven design practice as it is in the center. However, as Bonsiepe himself acknowledged, design practice had rather a restricted scope when it is only used to enrich the market for the upper classes through “ephemeral product differentiation”. Similarly, in the case of design aid to Turkey, design’s crucial role for both local and foreign agents lay in its potential to enrich international markets with exotically appealing products, as yet another form of “ephemeral product differentiation” (Bonsiepe, 1977, p. 14).

This brings us to another question to be raised about design practice in the periphery. It is now clear that the development of design in developing countries cannot be comprehensively studied without referring to its role in the development and expansion of capitalist markets (Er, 1997). Through the emphasis they placed on improving local craft products, U.S. design aid programs of the 1950s appear to suggest that peripheral countries were welcome to join the international design scene, particularly through a cultural interpretation of design. This may have further influenced the development of national design discourses in these countries. The way emergent discourses in the early 2000s defined the goal of Turkish design as modernizing the traditional and the aesthetic and conceptual similarities between products marketed under the label Turkish design and those produced in THDO is remarkable in this sense.

Before coming to a conclusion, there are still questions and relations to be explored. It is still too early to claim to understand how the Turkish participants experienced, interpreted and appropriated the whole experience, how they negotiated the design concepts and approaches introduced by the American designers, or how they used this experience to develop the field further because the story as covered in this article represents largely the American point of view and experience while records prepared by Turkish institutions remain unexplored. Analysis of these records would not only fill in existing gaps in knowledge but also open up new perspectives that would alter the analysis of American sources. Finally, to determine how the experience of the Turkish Handicraft Development Office influenced further development of design culture in Turkey and to reveal the dialogue between two parties would require recourse to personal archives and the memories of individual participants. It is through this way that clearer conclusions could be reached.

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**note** (↵ returns to text)

1. All online sources were last retrieved on July 2017. ↵

2. The American attempts at encouraging design development in allied countries during particularly postwar period has been subject to a number of design historical studies. Kikuchi (2008) uncovers the ICA led design aid to Japan, conducted by Russel Wright Associates. The U.S. interventions into the European context is covered by Rossi (2015) for the case of Italy and Yagou (2005) for the case of Greece. ↵


10. Brown (1958), Clabby (1957) and Fleishman (1957) provide an overview of the activities of design consultancy agencies in their assigned countries. Peter Muller Munk Associates’ program in Israel is recounted in the article “A New State Gets a New Profession” published in 1960 in Industrial Design. Delphia and Stern (2016) also document the design aid to Israel through a reading of the archival traces of the project. Russel Wright Associates’ mission is neatly summarized in "The Designer as Economic Diplomat” (1956). ↵

11. Cedric H. Seager to Dr. D. A. Fitzgerald, Nov. 14, 1956; 7.0 Technical Cooperation, 1957 Turkey; Decimal Files, 1955-1960, p. 1; Records of U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies, 1942-1963, Record Group 469; National Archives at...
Taking as a starting point the recent interest of design history in the history of actors, groups or events that fall outside an institutional context, this article discusses...
methodological challenges related to research on histories that are less documented in conventional archives. As these histories may often be found in private archives and/or the memories of historical actors rather than in conventional archives, they require a different type of methodological reflection and practice. Drawing on examples from the author’s ongoing PhD research on design education in the Scandinavian countries and the emergence of a discourse on sustainability in the late 1960s and 1970s, this article discusses problems and benefits regarding the use of oral sources, ephemera and grey literature. The latter is presented as a concept to expand the borders of the archival category in order to include more unconventional source material which might otherwise be lost. The article further argues that a more conscious approach to this type of methodology may add nuances to existing interpretations and complement the more conventional use of sources in design historical research.

1. Introduction: Why Oral History and Grey Literature?

Recent developments within design historical research include a broadening of the field to include not only the histories of main actors or institutions, but also to encompass the history of actors, groups or events which fall outside an institutional context (See e.g., Atkinson, 2006; Beegan, Atkinson, & Ryan, 2008; Fallan, 2012; Stern, 2014; Guins, 2015; Stein, 2016). Methodologically speaking, this trend actualizes a range of challenges regarding sources, as these histories are normally not well documented in what could be described as conventional archives, such as archives of educational institutions or professional organizations. Rather, they can be found in a variety of locations such as private archives and, if the time perspective allows it, in the memories of historical actors. The use of such unconventional archive material is far from new in design history, and material such as brochures, company catalogues or oral histories have been used to a large extent within the field. This does not, however, diminish the fact that this material requires special attentiveness and a different type of methodological reflection and practice.

This article draws on examples from my ongoing PhD project conducted at the University of Oslo as part of the research project Back to the Sustainable Future: Visions of Sustainability in the History of Design. The aim of the research project is to explore the historical conditions for, and development of, sustainable design, and my study focuses on design education in particular. It investigates how thoughts on ecology and environmental protection were developed at design schools in the Scandinavian countries, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, in the 1960s and 1970s, and intends to show how design students and educators were important actors in promoting new attitudes regarding the environment. The study thus focuses more on the conceptions of design held by these actors than the actual objects they designed. It thus attempts to respond to Buchanan’s call for an approach that “would reposition design history from material objects or ‘things’ to thought and action. In other words, what designers say and do, the history of their art as philosophy and practice” (1992, p. 14). In the case of design education and the emergence of a discourse on ecology and environmental protection in the Scandinavian countries, the design historical importance could be said to reside in “thought and action” just as much as – if not more than – in designed objects.

Despite its prominent role in today’s design discourse, the history of sustainability and design is a scarcely explored field. The generation of design students and educators working with sustainable design in the 1960s and 1970s can hardly be characterised as a marginalized group in the traditional sense. The absence of research on the topic nevertheless shows that these voices are represented in design history to a lesser degree. This may seem a peculiar claim, considering that several of my interviewees must be considered highly acknowledged designers and widely described figures. It does not, however, change the fact that there are histories that have received less attention and which remain to be told.

The design schools examined in the study are The National College of Applied Art and Craft (Statens håndverks- og kunstindustriskole) in Oslo, Bergen College of Arts and Crafts (Bergen Kunsthåndverkerskole), The School of Arts, Crafts, and Design (Konstfack) in Stockholm, The School of Design and Crafts in Gothenburg (Högskolan för design och konsthantverk), The School of Arts and Crafts (Kunsthåndværkerskolen)
and The Royal Danish Academy of Architecture (Kunstakademiets Arkitektskole) in Copenhagen. These schools' archives play a key role in my research as they have provided crucial information on the content of the education through curriculum and syllabus, accounts of the teaching staff and students, minutes of meetings, annual reports, etc. Although these sources have provided valuable information, the archival material available is, however, often sparse, both in volume and in wealth of detail. This has made it necessary to search for information outside the institutional archives, and use interviews with central actors to supplement the written source material and fill in gaps in missing information.

In addition to considering issues regarding the use of oral sources, the article discusses the concept of grey literature, which may be described as source material that falls between oral sources and commercially published material. I consider this a fruitful concept to expand the borders of the archival category in order to include source material which otherwise could be lost. By offering complementary documentation, grey literature may also act as corrective to, or corroboration of, understandings gleaned from sources such as institutional records, oral history and published material. The article further illuminates how a combination of oral history interviews and grey literature may be particularly valuable, as these kinds of sources may supplement each other to bring to light histories that have been either forgotten, under-communicated or omitted from official histories. A more conscious attitude towards this type of source and methodology may further add nuances to existing interpretations and complement more conventional use of sources in design historical research.

2. Oral History and Design History

The use of oral history methodology has a long tradition in scientific disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and cultural history (See e.g., Vansina, 1965; Thompson, 1975; Fraser, 1979; Hareven, 1982). Although a not unfamiliar methodology in design historical research (Walker, 1989, p. 6), the past decades have shown increased interest in oral history within the field of design history. This has led to several initiatives, such as Design History Society’s Oral History Project. The project records a series of interviews with people who have played a significant role in the development of design history as a scholarly field, such as designers, researchers and writers (Design History Society, n.d.). These stories are a valuable resource in the understanding of how individuals and institutions have shaped the notion of design history as an independent discipline. Another initiative is Journal of Design History’s special issue on oral history in 2006, guest edited by Linda Sandino. The issue was motivated by “the increasing tendency amongst design historians to use interviews, both as a means and a resource” (Sandino, 2006, p. 275). Sandino and Partington’s edited volume Oral History in the Visual Arts from 2013 comprises yet another valuable resource. Featuring contributions by historians, archivists and curators, the book provides an insight into the meaning of alternative and often both forgotten and hidden stories about visual practices. Through interviews and the work they produce, the book also demonstrates methods capable of exploring how values and ideologies are constructed, challenged or sustained (Sandino & Partington, 2013, p. 11). With its valuable examples, this work demonstrates how a more extensive use of similar sources would be important in generating new research within the design historical field.

3. The Oral History Interview: A Two-Way Thing

As suggested by Yow, oral history may be defined as “the recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form” (2005, p. 3). The fact that the term easily could be replaced by terms such as in-depth interview, recorded memoir, life history, life narrative, taped memories or life review, according to Yow “impl[ies] that there is someone else involved who frames the topics and inspires the narrator to begin the act of remembering, jogs memory, and records and presents the narrator’s words” (2005, p. 4). An oral history interview is thus made up of at least two people: the person who tells the story, and this “someone else,” that is the interviewer, who records the story. The interviewer consequently holds great power when it comes to the way he or she frames the topics, decides which questions to ask, and last but not least determines the emphasis in the subsequent presentation of the story in a written form. It is therefore essential to be attentive to historicizing the interviewers as well as the interviewees.
In the case of my own research on design education in Scandinavia, this has led to questions such as: how does my foreknowledge of the topic affect my questions to the interviewee? Is my selection of interviewees a result of coincidence or a deliberate sampling? In addition, to what degree is the information I get in the interviews coloured by my need and hypothesis? As stressed by Lees-Maffei and Fallan, researchers are “people with subjective responses” (2015, p. 12). Even though we are ever so much “trained to put aside subjective responses in our analyses, […] personal interests, values and experiences continue to inform the work of design historians, from choice of subject matter and theoretical frameworks to our methodological approaches and conclusions” (Lees-Maffei & Fallan, 2015, p. 6). It is therefore essential that scholars reflect on these issues in view of the ethical responsibility that comes with historical research. In the case of oral history where the sources are recorded, and to some degree formed, in a social interaction between the interviewee and the historian, the historians’ power of influence is particularly evident.

Equally important as being aware of the responsibility of the interviewer is crucial being attentive to the informant’s role. As noted by Oak, the oral history interview paves the way for both a recording and a shaping of the past (Oak, 2006, p. 346). This means that in his or her conveyance of the history, interviewees have the opportunity to exaggerate, understate and even rewrite their role. Being attentive to this aspect is particularly crucial in cases characterized by conflict and differing accounts of events and when the opponents have something to gain from asserting their version of the story. In my own research, I experienced this when I talked to two of the actors who were central in the establishment of an industrial design education in Norway. According to my sources, the process had been far from straightforward, involving considerably more disagreement than one could gather only by reading the minutes. This background information has been important to my further understanding and account of the case. The example further underlines how interviews enable the disclosure of disagreement and conflict in a manner that minutes of meetings never will.

As interviews simultaneously engage with both the period being discussed and the period in which the interview takes place, they must consequently be regarded as “locally managed occasions of interaction in which participants collaboratively construct meaning” (Oak, 2006, p. 346). This aspect of collaboration and social interaction could be said to be one of the key features of oral history. Through the narrator’s descriptions, he or she creates meaning and constructs stories about previous events in order to represent the past. In this way, the interviewee too becomes an historian, and the traditional distinction between professional and amateur collapses (Sandino & Partington, 2013, p. 11).

As appears from the above, oral sources are not objective. As pointed out by Portelli, however, this is of course the case with every source, but the “holiness of writing” often makes us forget it (1991, p. 53). While we usually view written documents such as minutes of meetings and conventions, parliamentary records, interviews reported in newspapers etc. as legitimate historical sources, we tend to forget that these written documents very often are merely the presentation of unidentified oral sources (Portelli, 1991, p. 51). Consequently, a written reproduction is not necessarily truer than an oral one. In oral history, however, one has to take into account the possible deficiency of memory. Memories may be floating and malleable and subject to modification over time. Oral testimonials should therefore be handled with the utmost care when used for research purposes. 

4. Whose Stories and How They Are Told

Many of my interviewees have been identified through archival research where their names have appeared in the archive material. While some here have had an evident position, others have been identified more by coincidence. The latter was the case when a negligible voucher revealed the name of a physicist at the University of Oslo who gave a guest lecture on solar energy at The National College of Applied Art and Craft in Oslo in 1976 (Figure 1). Despite the non-existing record of this in any other archival documents, the interview gave me important information, both on the content of the education at the design school in Oslo and the contact between this school and the University, which will be of great importance further on in my project. In many cases,
the interviewee’s enthusiasm and knowledge has led me to other interesting actors as well as new leads to explore, a process described by Stein as “snowball sampling” (2016, p. 31). It is, however, important to be aware that this may affect the selection of interviewees and consequently aim at a balanced selection. An enthusiastic interviewee’s “spinning off” may furthermore be both beneficial and challenging for the interviewer (Hazell & Fallan, 2015, p. 117). At best, it may lead to new discoveries and perspectives, which was the case when I interviewed former teacher and rector of the National College of Applied Art and Craft in Oslo, Roar Høyland. In a digression, he came to mention a solar energy installation he designed for the school building’s roof in the 1970s. Highly relevant for my research, but with no record of it in the school’s archive, a possible further exploration of this project will rely on the existence of oral sources and grey literature, such as drawings or notes.

![Fig. 1 – Invoice for double lecture on solar energy held by physicist Torfinn Lindem at The National College of Applied Art and Craft in Oslo, March 1976. The Regional State Archive, Oslo.](image)

An informant’s derailment may, however, become a problem if the interviewer allows his or her digressions to unduly form the project. What the informant may wish to tell about may be something other than the interviewer is interested in. The reason for this discrepancy may be caused by the interviewee’s interest, but also by his or her memory. In one of my interviews, I talked to a person who constantly seemed to avoid answering my questions, leading the conversation into other topics outside the scope of my project. Frustrating there and then, this apparent insistence on telling, even if it was ever so irrelevant to my questions, could, however, be because the person felt bad about not remembering the things I asked about, and felt the need to obscure or compensate for this fact by talking about something else. It could also be that they had never known anything about the particular topic at all, but feared that they had forgotten. Whatever the reason, the example points to the possible deficiency or weakening of memory, which seen in relation to ageing might be a source of discomfort to some people. This underlines the distinctive quality of oral testimonials compared to written material, as the sources are people, not documents.

The passing of time and people’s acquisition of experience may also affect their attitudes
and opinions. This could influence their recollection of past events, because, as pointed out by Portelli, “people’s versions of their past change when the individual changes” (1991, p. 61). In the case of Scandinavian design education in the late 1960s and 1970s, a time marked by political radicalism and young people manning the barricades for change in society as well as prevalent education, this is an important acknowledgement (Figure 2). Some of my interviewees have expressed that their political views have changed since the late 1960s, and explain their thoughts and actions at that time as “young idealism”. Others have described how their firm belief in the ability to improve the life of the worlds less privileged through design were undermined when they left school and started working for an industry run for profit. The experience these people have acquired over time has thus formed the attitudes they now hold. Their outlook has changed because they have changed, which again may influence the way they recall their past. This illustrates Portelli’s acknowledgement (1991, p. 61) that a life story is a work in progress, and that the point of time when the researcher’s path crosses the narrator’s consequently is a crucial factor for the shape of the presented story.

A personal testimonial from someone who experienced an event has the potential of adding layers of empathy to the story (Kjeldstadli, 1992, p. 186). The value of empathy is further emphasized by Lowenthal, who claims that: “Unless history displays conviction, interest, and involvement, it will not be understood or attended to. That is why subjective interpretation, while limiting knowledge, is also essential to communication. Indeed, the better a narrative exemplifies an historian’s point of view the more credible his account” (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 218). Consequently, according to Lowenthal, the actor’s subjective experience of an event is of great significance for the credibility of the story. In order to investigate how the late 1960s student rebellion developed at Scandinavian design institutions, it becomes significant not only what actually happened or “what people did,” to quote Portelli, “but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (Portelli, 1991, p. 50). In such a context, meanings and feelings about a particular event may be as important as the event itself, and oral history offers a fertile approach to this purpose. Interviewing Roar Høyland, I was initially interested in details on the Austro-American design theoretician Victor Papanek’s visit to the school in 1969. In a digression, quite irrelevant to my enquiry about Papanek, Høyland did, however, come to mention that he had been in Paris in May 1968, taking part in the student protests. His vivid recounting of the event, including his dramatic escape from the Parisian police, revealed an immensely engaged person, extremely updated on student politics and current societal issues. Due to this background, Høyland has turned out to be a highly important actor in my further research and his work as a teacher at the school from 1968 and onwards has become of particular interest.

The positions and voices of key actors like Høyland are crucial in forging a credible
account of the events and developments I am interested in. In acknowledging this type of multi-vocal subjectivity in the construction of our narratives, we can turn what is often cast as a weakness of oral history into a strength. Thompson has stated that “Oral evidence, by transforming the ‘objects’ of study into ‘subjects’, makes for a history which is not just richer, more vivid and heartrending, but truer” (Thompson, 1978, p. 90). Without the backdrop of Høyland’s history, his role at the school might have been judged differently. This could again have led to a different interpretation of the history.

People experience things differently and this might sometimes seem challenging for the historian. On some occasions, the interviews have revealed substantially different accounts of the same events. This is particularly the case with the mentioned visit of Victor Papanek to Oslo in 1969. While some of my interviewees describe how Papanek, with his radical views of design, caused furore among the students and irritation among the teachers, others describe the event in more moderate terms. This does not mean that one of the accounts is false. It rather demonstrates how people experience an event or a situation differently, which underlines the impossibility of finding an objective historical truth. In the case of the mentioned example, the differing experiences may also reveal different positions in late 1960s student politics. Even if the late 1960s generally is considered to be a period of student opposition and political revolt, a study on the on the period should not overlook the fact that there also were students with more moderate political views. This is an important acknowledgement when it comes to my project, as it sometimes may be tempting to emphasize and possibly overstate the more spectacular portrayals.

5. Source Material in the Grey Zone

Through my interviews, I have come across a more indefinable category of source material, given to me by interviewees. This material, such as letters, conference programmes and proceedings, reports etc., from the interviewees' private archives, has often been highly original and of great value to my project, and it has many of the same qualities as the material preserved in the institutional and official archives. This applies, for example, to material complementary to the student publications found in the school's archives, which has much of the same spontaneous visual expression. The fact that it is not protected by the preservation policies of the former, gives it a precarious nature, which leaves it at risk of being lost. Grey literature is a concept that moves across the sanctioned borderline of institutional archives. By acknowledging and applying this category, one may hopefully equate the status of more unconventional material with that of source material found in traditional archives. Such a rise in status of material of more vulnerable and/or ephemeral character, often found in private archives, may hopefully contribute to more of this material being preserved.

Grey literature may be defined as “non-conventional literature, not issued through the normal commercial publication channels” (Alberani & Castro, 2001, p. 237). It could also be added that grey literature is material that is not always easy to find, not always available, and that the documents usually are intended for a limited number of readers (Alberani & Castro, 2001, pp. 237-238). Based on this definition, material that falls into the category of grey literature includes theses and dissertations, faculty research works, reports of meetings, conferences, seminars and workshops, students' projects and in-house publications of associations and organizations, to mention a few (Okoroma, 2011, p. 790). Much of the material found in the archives of the design schools has been of this nature. The label “grey” should therefore not be limited only to material outside conventional archives. Drawing a line from published material to oral testimonials, imagining these as bookends, one may rather say that grey literature is everything in between. This consequently includes material from conventional archives as well as more atypical information such as letters and personal notes.

The diverse nature of grey literature may raise questions regarding classification of the source material. One of these is whether or not the definition includes “ephemera”, which according to Makepeace is “the collective name given to material which carries a verbal message and is produced either by printing or illustrative processes, but not in the standard book, periodical or pamphlet format” (Makepeace, 1985, p. 10). Ephemera are usually produced for short-term use, and include material such as tickets, timetables, posters, invitations, postcards etc. (Makepeace, 1985, p. 220). Consequently, this
category shares obvious characteristics with grey literature, such as the intention of production, circulation patterns and intended durability. A possible conflation of the two is, however, rejected by Alberani and De Castro (2001) who emphasize the fact that ephemera is not literature (p. 237). I would nonetheless argue that in the context of design history, this is a detrimental and superfluous distinction. Dealing with both visual and text-based sources, design historians may easily come across written material on the borderline to ephemera.

This may for example be the case with fanzines, which as (fan) magazines easily could pass as literature and consequently be labelled grey literature, according to Alberani and De Castro’s definition of the term. In a design historical study, however, the fanzine’s visual expression could be considered just as relevant and interesting as its textual expression. This is confirmed by Triggs, who in her study on British punk fanzines from the 1970s argues that it is “as much the graphic language that differentiated fanzines from the mainstream as the content of these publications” (2006, p. 81). A too rigid emphasis on the textual or literary aspect of the material thus seems less productive in a design historical context. Rather, one has more to gain from accepting these blurred lines between ephemera and grey literature, or even be prepared to see the former as a visual form, or an under-category of the latter. Fanzines can also serve as an example of how grey literature may enable a broadening of the design historical field to include the histories of actors, groups or events that are not well documented in conventional archives. One of the aims in Triggs study is precisely to “recover from history an area of graphic design activity that has largely been ignored” (Triggs, 2006, p. 69). Showing how “fanzines became vehicles of subcultural communication and played a fundamental role in the construction of punk identity and a political community” (p. 70), Triggs’ study sheds new light on a subculture which would influence cultural expressions in years to come.

In the case of my own project, I came across a comprehensive range of grey literature material in an interview with a former student at the design school in Oslo. The material consisted of extensive documentation on the activities of the Scandinavian Design Students Organization (SDO), a scarcely described pan Nordic cooperation that was active in the late 1960s. By studying the minutes of the organization board’s meetings, the programme for and lectures being held, at three summer seminars, as well as the two published issues of the organization’s members magazine &, I have gained insight into an organization which proved to be influential, not only in the late 1960s design student politics, but also in the further development of Nordic design education (Figure 3 and 4). Thanks to this source material, I have also been able to specify and verify much of the information I have been given in the interviews.
As Makepeace points out, grey literature can “help to give an increased awareness of the age when it was produced” (Makepeace, 1985, p. 219). An interesting example in this context is the project “Affischerna 1967-1979” (The Posters 1967-1979), which presents an impressive collection of posters from the Swedish alternative movement. Originally an online presentation (http://www.affischerna.se/) of the enthusiast Håkan Agnsäter’s private collection, the project later developed into several exhibitions as well as a book (Agnsäter, 2013). The project is particularly relevant to my project, as the collection contains a series of posters made by student of the School of Arts, Crafts and Design (Konstfack) in protest against the United Nations’ Conference on the Human
Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972 (Figure 5). According to Agnsäter, the students went out during the night and “put up posters on the walls of buildings in the central parts of Stockholm, where the UN delegates would pass the next day. Every morning, however, the posters were painted over with grey colour” (Agnsäter, 2013, p. 102). This damaging of the posters that were put up makes the ones that still exist both scarce and valuable. It also brings to our attention an amazing story about which I have found no record of anywhere else but hopefully will be able to research further.

In the introduction to his book, Agnsäter describes how he accidentally, while looking for something else in his basement, came across his old collection of posters:

We roll up poster after poster and are met by a many-coloured splendour, fists eager to fight, solidarity with the Vietnamese people, rock music against nuclear power, ideas for a better world. Memories come flowing; the motives become keys to long-closed rooms. This has to be shown to more people, I keep thinking. (Agnsäter, 2013, p. 7).

In light of the discussion on ephemera, the quote is interesting in several ways. Firstly, it describes Agnsäter’s reaction when he acknowledged the value of the material: that it deserved a better fate than lying hidden and forgotten in a basement (which is exactly the case with much grey literature and ephemera). Agnsäter initially clearly saw the value of saving the collection, as he, at some point, placed it in his basement instead of throwing it away. The rediscovery of the posters many years later was, however, accidental. This points to the fact that the rediscovery and preservation of ephemera often is a result of coincidence. It could also be added that many posters are torn down when they are replaced or pasted over with new ones, especially those which have been put up illegally on walls or fences (Makepeace, 1985, p. 70).

Secondly, Agnsäter’s quote demonstrates the power of ephemera material to serve as
memory triggers or, as he describes them; “keys to long-closed rooms”. The posters are thus not only important due to their visual qualities or sentimental value; they are keys to uncovering histories from the past, which makes them valuable tools also in oral history interviews. Stein has shown how this kind of material (in her case photographs) had “the effect of sparking the conversation, reminding the participants of something they had forgotten and that I would not have known to ask about” (Stein, 2014). This has also been the case in several of my interviews. Showing a former student at the design school in Oslo the minutes from a meeting he attended in the late 1960s called forth memories, which again led both him and me onto new themes, valuable for my project.

6. Conclusion

In line with Buchanan’s call for more focus on the various conceptions of design held by designers in the past, presented in the introduction (1992, p. 14), Fallan (2010) has pointed out that design history is best expressed as a history of both objects and ideas, consequently not just manifested in concrete objects, but also as discourse and ideology (p. 48). In this article, I have argued that oral history and grey literature are invaluable assets in this ongoing expansion of the field of design history, as it can facilitate access to historical actors’ ideas and actions not documented by conventional written sources. By listening to the histories of actors in a particular design historical discourse, we may learn about the mode of thought and ideas that have formed the basis of their work, whether as designers or educators. In her study on domestic advice literature, Lees-Maffei (2014) introduces the concept of “real ideals”, which she describes as “the normative ideals shared by members of a society [that] prescribe desirable behaviours and consumption practices” (p. 2). While Lees-Maffei employs advice literature to uncover the real ideals of household advisors past and present, oral history, and also grey literature, may be instrumental in revealing the real ideals of designers and design educators in the 1970s. Time is, however, of essence when it comes to oral sources, and utilization of these requires prompt action.

Although its methodological discourse is more mature in disciplines such as archaeology, medical science and library and information studies (See e.g., Luzi, 2000; Farace & Schöpfel, 2010; Roth, 2010), I would claim that grey literature is also a fertile concept for design history. As a comprehensive category, grey literature includes material from both conventional archives and private archives. The distinction between these two may be changing, as private archives may eventually become sanctioned and institutionalized. This has been the case with the archives of, for example, Richard Buckminster Fuller and Victor J. Papanek, which have been transferred to Stanford University Libraries and the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, respectively (Chu & Trujillo, 2009, p. 1; Sacchetti, 2012). The private archives I use in my research will, however, never go through the same transaction as the affiliated actors do not have the same status. They nevertheless hold important historical documentation on lesser known groups and events, invaluable to both me and researchers to come. A possible application of these archives does, however, require a more general acknowledgement of the value of the material they hold. An expansion of the borders of the archival category, to include conventional as well as unconventional archive material may equalize the relation between the two. Such a rise in status of unsanctioned archive material may, furthermore, contribute to its preservation.

By presenting examples from my research on design education in Norway, Sweden and Denmark in the late 1960s and 1970s, this article has discussed the practice and methodological challenges that accompany the use of oral history and grey literature. It has argued that the value of oral testimonies to design historical research lies in the ability to both reveal information that does not appear in written sources and to supplement and expand existing information. As shown, oral sources may also disclose information on groups that have been left out of public record. Interviews may reveal different perceptions of past events, but this does not necessarily make one perception truer than the other. It does nevertheless indicate that oral histories – as well as conventional archive material, should be treated with an academic distance and presented as one point of view rather than an absolute truth. This is, however, the case with all records of the past, also conventional archive material.

Oral history may be particularly fruitful in combination with grey literature, and the article
has suggested the concept of grey literature as a suitable framework to expand the borders of conventional archival categories. By considering written, unpublished sources, whether they are conventional or unconventional archive material, under the umbrella of grey literature, one avoids the risk of underrating the latter and consequently losing important parts of our history. Such an expansion, of course, will not be at the expense of traditional archive material. I would rather claim that a rethinking of the archival category would strengthen the field of design historical research and allow new and interesting histories to be told. Moreover, I believe that through rigorous attention to the use of less conventional sources of grey literature and oral testimony, design history can open up new trajectories of inquiry for a broader constituency of scholars interested in the history of visual and material culture.

References


1. Even if Finland often is included in design historical discussions on Scandinavia, I here employ a stricter definition, based on established geographical and language cultural demarcations.

2. Among my interviewees are industrial designer Peter Opsvik, of international renown for his ergonomic chairs.

3. For a thorough discussion of oral history and memory, see Yow (2005, pp. 35-67).


6. Interview with Roar Høyland, February 27, 2013.

7. This definition was formulated at the 1978 York seminar, which was organized by the Commission of the European Communities – EC (now European Union) in co-operation with the British Library Lending Division – BLLD (now: British Library Bibliographic Services & Document Supply Centre), as a response to the growing awareness of the problems associated with access to documents not issued through normal communication channels. A major aim of the seminar was to agree on a definition of the concept (Knowles, 1981). According to Alberani and De Castro, the seminar "represents a fundamental stage in the discussion about non-conventional or grey literature (GL) in Europe" (Alberani & De Castro, 236).